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# THE NATIONAL READY TO LEARN TELEVISION FORUM

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Inspired by Dr. Ernest L. Boyer's 1991 book, *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation*, cable, network and public television executives and producers, educators, researchers and child development specialists convened at a forum in Washington, DC on May 17 and 18, 1994, sponsored by America's Public Television Stations (APTS) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Participants discussed how to use television effectively to accomplish goal number one of the nation's education goals—by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

## FORUM GOALS:

- 1) Develop strategies to ensure that television programs for children aged 0 - 6, their parents and caregivers, are of the highest quality.
- 2) Define incentives, both financial and regulatory, that must be in place to promote the development of television programs which will help to prepare young children to enter school in the 21st century ready to learn.
- 3) Define technology and distribution systems that must be in place to make high-quality children's programming universally available.

## BACKGROUND:

Today great challenges exist in educating our nation's young people. In a 1991 survey kindergarten teachers said that 35 percent of their pupils are not prepared for school in at least one key dimension. Moreover, when asked to compare the readiness of today's students with those of five years ago, 42 percent said the situation is becoming worse.

A broad range of resources must be brought to bear on improving early education, and television is an indispensable component. As Dr. Boyer stated, in opening the National Ready to Learn Television Forum, "After parents, television is, in fact, a child's most compelling, most influential teacher—one that can either profoundly enrich or dramatically diminish the quality of their lives and, ultimately, their capacity to learn."

## RESULTS:

The following immediate action steps (in the areas of programming, community outreach and awareness, funding and incentives, and technology) were recommended by forum participants.

1. A statement defining educational programming, was drafted for submission to the Federal Communications Commission's June 28 hearing on implementation of the Children's Television Act of 1990:

*While one cannot legislate quality or guarantee success, we define educational programming, for all age groups, as that which*

- *is developed with a clear definition and documentation of the age-appropriate educational needs to be addressed;*
- *is designed with a distinct vision of how the program will meet those needs through its format and content; and*
- *employs educational consultation in its development and/or demonstrates its efficacy in achieving its organizing principles.*

2. A workshop will be convened in fall, 1994 in Los Angeles, organized by the American Center for Children's Television (ACCT), to provide a practical and engaging introduction for producers and writers to the developmental needs, abilities and interests of children, ages 2-5, 6-11 and 12-16.

3. By August 1, the American Center for Children's Television (ACCT), in consultation with America's Public Television Stations, will prepare a proposal for a National Resource Center on Television and Learning,
4. DIC Entertainment will create an animated character to identify ready to learn programming. Royalties from use of the character will benefit the Resource Center. The character will become part of a wide effort to develop navigational tools that can help families find ready to learn programming and services.
5. ACCT, with forum participants, will establish a "Boyer Award" for outstanding ready to learn services, as part of the Ollie Awards for Excellence in Children's Television.
6. Children First and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting will meet with interested forum participants in the fall of 1994 to outline ways in which a comprehensive and coordinated public awareness campaign could be developed with public and private partners to promote effective ready to learn television programming and services, regardless of the media on which they are available.
7. On behalf of forum participants, APTS will urge Congress to: create tax incentives to encourage corporate investment in children's television programming, outreach materials and services; allocate additional funds for the National Endowment for Children's Educational Television (NECET), and empower the Department of Commerce to leverage these funds through its associations with American corporations; make a five-year commitment to ready to learn funding, of no less than \$10 million per year, to be used collaboratively by the Department of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB); and coordinate the investment in ready to learn television programming and services that occurs in the Departments of Education and Commerce and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.
8. Forum participants will sign a letter to Congress recommending increased federal funding for public broadcasting.
9. Forum participants will recommend to the Federal Communications Commission and Congress that profits from the upcoming auction of telecommunications spectrum space be earmarked for investment in ready to learn television programming and services, through the NECET or the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.
10. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) will convene all necessary parties to identify steps that could lead to providing videocassette distribution of beneficial programming through schools, churches, libraries, community centers and video retailers at little or no cost.
11. To bolster public television stations' capacity to carry a full-day schedule of ready to learn television programming, APTS, CPB, PBS and such other partners as may be appropriate, will seek: incentives to get video recording equipment into schools, enabling them to record overnight feeds of instructional television (ITV) programming (thereby freeing daytime hours for ready to learn programs); cable access for as many schools as possible, and local cable channel allocation for ITV distribution; and affordable access to new technologies for ready to learn programming.
12. PBS will identify key companies or organizations, including videogame and software companies, and seek voluntary attempts to achieve interoperability among technologies that may be used to deliver educational programming to homes and schools.



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